DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 213 063 CS 503 768

AUTHOR Pearson, Judy C.
TITLE Gender, Similarity, and Source Credibility.
PUB DATE Feb 82
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (Denver, CO, February 19-23, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Attitude Measures; *Communication Research; *Credibility; Females; *Information Sources; Interpersonal Competence; Males; *Role Perception; *Sex Differences; Sex Role; Surveys

ABSTRACT

More than 300 adults responded to a telephone survey designed to examine whether the gender of the source and the similarity of gender between the source and the receiver affected the receiver's perception of source credibility. The results indicated that (1) men had more overall credibility than did women, (2) women recognized that they would have more credibility if they were men, (3) men recognized that they would have less credibility if they were women, and (4) both sexes recognized that they would have higher credibility with other persons of the same sex than with persons of the opposite sex, and that persons of the same sex would have more credibility with them. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED213063

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

GENDER, SIMILARITY, AND SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Judy C. Pearson
Associate Professor
School of Interpersonal Communication
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio 45701

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Judy C. Pearson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented at the Western Speech Communication Association Convention; Denver, Colorado; February, 1982.

CS503768

The importance of source credibility is at least twenty-three centuries old. The Aristotelian dictum that a source's "character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses," (Aristotle, 1941, 1356a, lines 12-14) has been expanded recently in experimental studies which have attempted to determine more precise information about source credibility. A prevalent view in such studies is that source credibility represents a subset of person perception (Infante, 1980; McCroskey & Young, 1979) and that source credibility is a perceptual variable in which the source serves as a stimulus and the receivers serve as respondents. In line with this view, the multidimensionality of the construct has been examined. The number of dimensions and the names of those dimensions varies among studies (cf. Berlo, Lemart, & Mertz, 1969; McCroskey, 1966; and McCroskey & Wheeless, 1976).

The lack of stability among the factor analytic studies that have been performed may be a result of a number of causes. One problem may lie in the design of the studies which requires that subjects respond to a complex set of variables that includes a source at a particular point in time, with a particular topic, a specific message, in a unique communication situation, rather than to an individual source of a message. The variability in subjects' responses may be a result of any of these factors. Attributions of source credibility may, in fact, be in error as subjects are responding to other variables in the communication process.

One area in which attribution of source credibility has been equivocal is the literature concerning female/male differences. In general, persons with high status, including men and anglo-Americans, have been shown to be more effective as persuaders and as writers and have been favored for high status positions while persons with low status, including women, Mexican Americans, and blacks, have been viewed less favorably (cf. Ramirez, 1977; Noel & Allen, 1976; Wheeler, Wilson, & Tarantola, 1976; & De La Zerda & Hopper, 1979). Such conclusions have been drawn even when messages are identical which have led researchers to speculate that women, among other groups, have lower credibility than have men. A frequently cited study demonstrated that audiences responded more favorably to messages attributed to a male communicator than to a female communicator (Goldberg, 1968). Male sources of messages also received higher competence ratings than did female sources in an investigation of persuasive discourse (Miller & McReynolds, 1973). However, in another study, females received higher scores on three dimensions of credibility that were examined--trustworthiness, dynamism, and competence (Vigliano, 1974). In addition, while male newscasters were shown to be more effective than female newscasters in producing retention of newscast materials, there were no significant differences between male and female newscasters on believability (Tan, Reidy, Huff, & Miles, 1980).

One possible explanation for the differences in the attribution of credibility to female and male sources may lie in the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic credibility. Extrinsic credibility refers to that view of the source that a receiver holds prior to discourse; intrinsic credibility arises out of the communication event. The characteristics of an individual including his or her personality, sex, or prior reputation may affect a receiver's view of his or her credibility before the communication event. For example, in the examination of persuasive discourse which was cited above, the topic of the message was expanding the A. B. M. missile system and the source was identified alternatively as a man or a woman with a Ph. D. in nuclear physics (Miller & McReynolds, 1973). Respondents in this study may have been reacting to the sex of the source of the message (extrinsic credibility) or to the combination of the sex of the source and the hypothetical academic degree and topic of the message. In other words, receivers may view men as more competent when they are presenting messages which are consistent with a stereotypical role, but may view women as more competent when they are speaking on traditionally female topics. For instance, if the message concerned childcare or a nurturing role, a female may have been viewed as more competent.

The literature on the differential grading of female and male student speeches further compounds the problem. An examination of the evaluation of the messages of women and men consistently demonstrates that females receiver higher scores on classroom speeches (cf. Pearson, 1980c; Pearson & Nelson, 1981; Barker, 1966). In addition, female students receive proportionately more positive comments than negative comments than do male students (cf. Pearson, 1975; Sprague, 1971). However, other studies demonstrate no difference in the public speaking of female and male speakers: one study showed that sex did not correlate significantly with public speaking ability ratings but that women did receive higher grades in the basic speech communication classroom (Hayes, 1977), and another study yielded no difference in the persuasiveness of female and male speakers (Sloman, 1974). It has been suggested that women may be uniquely suited for the public speaking setting or that woman may be especially responsive to the classroom setting. Stereotypical characteristics such as sensitivity to the needs of others, understanding, compassion, and warmth which are associated with women may assist them in the public speaking setting while feminine personality traits including compliance, yielding, and responsiveness may assist women in achieving higher grades in the classroom.

The literature on differential grading of female and male sources in the classroom does not offer conclusive evidence,

but it clearly suggests that intervening variables can alter the perception of men and women engaged in communication behaviors in different settings. One of the purposes of the current study was to examine the credibility of men and women, without regard to context. Based on previous literature and inferring that the superiority of women in particular contexts of communication was a result of the context rather than the gender of the source, we hypothesized that

H_1: Men will be perceived to have more credibility than women.

Similarly, we felt that men would perceive that their credibility would be lower if they were of the opposite sex while women would perceive that their credibility would be higher if they were of the opposite sex. In other words, holding other characteristics constant, men and women would respond that their credibility would be altered by the single change of gender. We therefore hypothesized that

H_2: Men and women will respond differently to the question of having more credibility if they were of the opposite sex.

Both female and male interviewers were involved in conducting this study. Earlier studies suggest that the gender of the interviewer or the experimenter may affect the results (cf. Bock & Bock, 1977; Brooks, 1974) while other studies conclude that the gender of the interviewer is not a significant factor

(cf. Chelune, 1976; Hoffman-Graff, 1977; Vondracek & Vondracek, 1971; Hoffman & Spencer, 1977). As a result of these conflicting findings, we examined the sex of the interviewer and included the research question,

R_1: Does the sex of the interviewer affect the selection of men or women as more credible?

Another variable which may be confounding the differences in attribution of source credibility to women and men may be the sex of the receiver. Returning to the literature on classroom criticism, the sex of the evaluator appears to have some predictive value in the determination of grades. A number of studies suggest that females are more lenient as evaluators (cf. Pfister, 1955; Sikkink, 1956; Bock, Powell, Kitchens, & Flavin, 1976) while other research could demonstrate no difference in the evaluation offered by female and male evaluators (cf. Bryan & Wilke, 1942; Ruechelle, 1958; Bostrom & Kemp, 1968; Sloman, 1974; Pearson, 1980a). Studies in the classroom which have focused on specific critiquing behavior have demonstrated that females are more generous than males in rating the ethos of a speaker (Haiman, 1949), that females tend to score speakers, regardless of sex, higher than males on trustworthiness and dynamism, but not on competence (Vigliano, 1974); and that females write more delivery, positive and personal comments than do males in their written speech criticism (Sprague, 1971). Finally, Lynn (1974) found that 1) females tend to perceive highly credible sources unassociated with

any message more favorably than do males, while males tend to perceive positive communication from highly credible sources more favorably than do females; 2) females tend to perceive source-less subjective messages more favorably than do males, while males tend to perceive source-less objective messages more favorably than do females; and 3) males perceive subjective messages more favorably when the source is specifically identified than when the source is unknown, while females perceive subjective messages more favorably when the source is not identified.

The interaction between the gender of the evaluator, or receiver, and the gender of the speaker, or source, has also been examined in classroom criticism. It appears that women tend to grade men higher than they grade women (Pfister, 1955) and that men tend to grade women higher than they grade men (Pfister, 1955) in some research, but other studies have not replicated these findings (cf. Pearson, 1980b).

Research on similarity between sources and receivers is useful in examining source credibility. Individuals tend to extend more positive affect for those whom they judge to be similar to themselves than for those whom they perceive to be dissimilar from themselves (cf. Heider, 1958) and positive affect leads to perceptions of perceived similarity (cf. Byrne & Wong, 1962). Similarity results in interpersonal attraction (cf. Newcomb, 1961; Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Byrne & Clore, 1966). Receiver-source similarity has been shown

to produce attitude change (cf. Berscheid, 1966; Brock, 1965; Mills & Jellison, 1968). Further, perceived similarity is related to attraction and some of the dimensions of credibility (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1971; Rogers, 1973; Alpert & Anderson, 1973). Consistent with these findings, perceived source competence was shown to be consistently the best predictor of selective exposure behavior with homophily and attitudinal involvement adding to the predictive model (Wheeless, 1974). Finally, persons have been shown to be more easily persuaded by peers than by non-peers (Cantor, Alfonso, & Zillman, 1976) and preschool male children demonstrate a preference for their fathers over their mothers in play activities (Lynn & DePalma-Cross, 1974).

In light of the conflicting findings between the classroom setting and the research on similarity, we offer the following four research questions.

R_2: Do individuals perceive that they will have higher credibility with persons of the same sex or with persons of the opposite sex?

R_3: Does the sex of the subject affect the selection of the same sex or the opposite sex with whom she or he would have more credibility?

R_4: Do individuals perceive that others will have more credibility with them if they are of the same sex than if they are of the opposite sex?

R_5: Does the sex of the subject affect the selection of a person of the same sex or the opposite sex who will have more credibility with them?

METHOD

Data Collection

The subjects in this study were randomly selected from the local telephone directory of residents of a middle-sized midwestern university town. The final subject pool consisted of 305 individuals; 145 men and 160 women; 209 students and 96 non-students; 205 individuals were 25 years of age or younger and 140 individuals were over 25 years of age. Each subject was contacted by telephone by a trained interviewer. Twelve of the interviewers were male and eight of the interviewers were female; each interviewer completed about 15 interviews. The interviewers were trained and supervised by the investigator to insure that they conducted the interviews consistently. Interviewers were instructed to read questions verbatim and were advised on responses to particular questions. The telephone interviews were conducted between February 2 and February 5, 1981, in the late afternoon and early evening hours.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire that provided the basis for the telephone interviews was based on the research questions and hypotheses that were developed in this study. Interviewers recorded their own sex, the sex of the interviewee, whether the interviewee was a student or a nonstudent, and placed the interviewee in an age category. Interviewees then answered four questions which all had dichotomous responses: 1) In your view, which

have more credibility with others: a) men or b) women? 2) If you were the opposite sex, would you be viewed as having a) more credibility or b) less credibility? 3) Do you feel you have more credibility with the a) opposite sex or b) the same sex? 4) Do others have more credibility with you if they are of the a) opposite sex or b) same sex?

Data Analyses

Hypothesis 1 and research questions 1, 3, and 5 were examined using regression analysis and the general linear models procedure from the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) which provides Type IV Sum of Squares, a conservative estimate of difference. The dependent variable for hypothesis 2 was the credibility assigned to a person of the opposite sex and the independent variable was the sex of the respondent. The dependent variable for research question 1 was the credibility score assigned to men and women and the independent variable was the sex of the interviewer. The dependent variable for research question 3 and 4 was the credibility assigned to same sex or opposite sex persons and the independent variable was the sex of the respondent. Hypothesis 1 and research questions 2 and 4 were examined with t-tests.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1--Men will be perceived to have more credibility that women--was verified. Two hundred and thirteen subjects selected men as higher in credibility than women, 85 selected women over men, and 7 subjects asserted that they could not select

either men or women as more credible which accounted for a significant difference ($t = 15.30$, 298 d.f., $p < .0001$).

Hypothesis 2--Men and women will respond differently to the questior of having more credibility if they were of the opposite sex--was verified. The variable of sex provided a significant difference ($F(1,297) = 34.88$; $p < .0001$). In general, men felt they would have less credibility if they were of the opposite sex and women felt they would have more credibility if they were of the opposite sex.

Research Question 1--Does the sex of the experimenter affect the selection of men or women as more credible--was answered affirmatively. Subjects who responded to female experimenters selected males as more credibile at a significantly higher level than they selected females as more credible ($F(1, 293) = 4.14$; $p = .0429$).

Research Question 2--Do individuals perceive that they will have higher credibility with persons of the same sex or with persons of the opposite sex--was answered affirmatively. One hundred and ninety four subjects selected the same sex, 103 subjects selected the opposite sex, and 8 subjects chose neither the same nor the opposite sex which accounted for a significant difference ($t = 59.76$, 297 d.f., $p < .0001$).

Research Question 3--Does the sex of the subject affect the selection of the same sex or the opposite sex with whom she or he would have more credibility--was not answered in the affirmative ($F(1,295) = 1.51$; $p = .2195$).

Research Question 4--Do individuals perceive that others will have more credibility with them if they are of the same sex than if they are of the opposite sex--was answered affirmatively. Two hundred and two subjects selected the same sex, 98 subjects selected the opposite sex, and 5 subjects chose neither the same nor the opposite sex which accounted for a significant difference ($t = 61.32$, 300 d.f., $p < .0001$).

Research Question 5--Does the sex of the subject affect the selection of a person of the same sex or the opposite sex who will have more credibility with them--was answered affirmatively ($F(1,292) = 6.97$; $p = .0087$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study support the view that both the gender of the source and the similarity of gender between the source and receiver affect the receiver's perception of source credibility. Men appear to have more overall credibility than do women, women appear to recognize that they would have more credibility if they were men, and men appear to recognize that they would have less credibility if they were women. Individuals perceive that they will have higher credibility with others of the same sex than with others of the opposite sex, regardless of their own gender. Individuals perceive that others will have more credibility with them if they are of the same sex than if they are of the opposite sex; however, a gender difference on this variable also exists which suggests

that men find that others of the same sex are significantly more credible than do women find that others of the same sex are credible.

This study suggests some interesting avenues for future research. On the one hand, it appears that men and women are perceived to exist in superior-subordinate roles with regard to source credibility. The power relationship that exists between men and women in our culture affects the nature of the perceptions of credibility. Stereotyping may be operative as individuals make assessments of the credibility of persons on the basis of known power situations. On the other other hand, individuals appear to rely on principles such as homophily, psychological propinquity, and similarity in drawing conclusions of their own credibility with others. Subcultural groups may find that their credibility is enhanced when communicating with members of their own subculture regardless of the dominant power structure in the larger culture. At any rate, it does not appear that the overriding asymmetrical power relationship which currently exists between men and women is the only influence in determining the source credibility of individuals in our culture.

REFERENCES

Alpert, M. I. & Anderson, Jr. W. T. Optimal heterophily and communication effectiveness: Some empirical findings. Journal of Communication, 1973, 23, 328-343.

Aristotle. Rhetoric. W. Rhys Roberts trans. in The Basic Works of Aristotle, R. McKeon (Ed.), New York: Random House, 1941, 1: 1356a, lines 12-14.

Barker, L. L. Irrelevant factors and speech evaluation. Southern Speech Journal, 1966, 32, 10-18.

Berlo, D. K., Lemert, J. B., & Mertz, R. Dimensions for evaluating the acceptability of message sources. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1969, 33, 563-576.

Berscheid, E. Opinion change and communicator-comunicatee similarity and dissimilarity. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 4, 670-680.

Bock, D. G. & Bock, E. H. The effects of the sex of the experimenter, expectancy inductions, and the sex of the rater on leniency, halo, and trait errors in speech rating behavior. Communication Education, 1977, 26, 298-306.

Bock, D. G., Powell, L., Kitchens, J. T., & Flavin, J. W. The influence of sex differences in speech evaluation: situational and media effects. Communication Education, 1976, 26, 143-153.

Bostrom, R. N. & Kemp, A. P. Type of speech, sex of speaker, and sex of subject as factors influencing persuasion. Central States Speech Journal, 1968, 30, 245-252.

Brock, T. C. Communicator-recipient similarity and decision change. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1965, 1, 650-654.

Brooks, L. Interactive effects of sex and status on self-disclosure. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1974, 21, 469-474.

Bryan, A. I., & Wilke, W. H. Audience tendencies in rating public speakers. Journal of Applied Psychology, 1942, 26, 371-381.

Byrne, D. & Clore, Jr., G. L. Predicting interpersonal attraction toward strangers presented in three different stimulus modes. Psychological Science, 1966, 4, 239-240.

Byrne, D. & Nelson, D. Attraction as a linear function of proportion of positive reinforcements. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1965, 1, 659-663.

Byrne, D. & Wong, T. J. Racial prejudice, interpersonal attraction and assumed dissimilarity of attitudes. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1962, 65, 246-252.

Cantor, J. R., Alfonso, H. & Zillmann, D. The persuasive effectiveness of the peer appeal and a communicator's first-hand experience. Communication Research, 1976, 3, 293-310.

Chelune, G. J. A multidimensional look at sex and target differences. Psychological Reports, 1976, 39, 259-263.

De La Zerda, N. & Hopper, R. Employment interviewers' reactions to Mexican American speech. Communication Monographs, 1979, 46, 126-134.

Goldberg, P. Are women prejudiced against women? Transaction, 1968, 6, 28.

Haiman, F. S. An experimental study of the effects of ethos in public speaking. Speech Monographs, 1949, 16, 190-202.

Hayes, D. T. Nonintellective predictors of public speaking ability and academic success in a basic college-level speech communication course. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 1977.

Heider, F. The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations. New York: John Wiley, 1958.

Hoffman-Graff, M. A. Interviewer use of positive and negative self-disclosure and interviewer-subject sex pairing. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1977, 24, 184-190.

Hoffman, M. A. & Spencer, G. P. Effect of interviewer self-disclosure and interviewer-subject sex pairing on perceived and actual subject behavior. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1977, 24, 383-390.

Infante, D. A. The construct validity of semantic differential scales for the measurement of source credibility. Communication Quarterly, 1980, 28, 19-26.

Lynn, D. B. & DePalma-Cross, A. Parent preference of preschool children. Journal of Marriage and Family, 1974, 36, 553-559.

Lynn, L. A. Language emotionality, source credibility, and sex effects: An experimental study of communication perception. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1974.

McCroskey, J. C. Scales for the measurement of ethos. Speech Monographs, 1966, 33, 65-72.

McCroskey, J. C. & Wheeless, L. R. Introduction to Human Communication. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976.

McCroskey, J. C. & Young, T. Ethos and credibility: The construct and its measurement after three decades. Paper presented at the Eastern Communication Association convention, Philadelphia, 1979.

Miller, G. R. & McReynolds, M. Male chauvinism and source competence: A research note. Speech Monographs, 1973, 40, 154-155.

Mills, J. & Jellison, J. M. The effect on opinion change of similarity between the communicator and the audience addressed. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1968, 9, 153-156.

Newcomb, T. M. The Acquaintance Process. New York: Holt, Rinehart. & Winston, 1961.

Noel, R. C. & Allen, M. J. Sex and ethnic bias in the evaluation of student editorials. Journal of Psychology, 1976, 94, 53-58.

Pearson, J. C. The effects of sex and sexism on the criticism of classroom speeches. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1975.

Pearson, J. C. The influence of the level of instruction and the sex of the teacher on the criticism of classroom speeches. Iowa Journal of Speech Communication, 1980a, 12, 28-34.

Pearson, J. C. An investigation of the effects of sex and sexism on the criticism of classroom speeches. Paper presented to the Western Speech Communication Association Convention, Portland, Oregon, February, 1980b.

Pearson, J. C. An investigation of speaker sex, sexism, and sex role identification and the evaluation of classroom speeches. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention, New York City, New York, November, 1980c.

Pearson, J. C. & Nelson, P. E. The basic speech communication course: An examination of instructor sex, student sex, and type of course on grading. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention, Anaheim, California, November, 1981.

Pfister, E. R. A study of the influence of certain selected factors on the ratings of speech performances. Unpublished Ed. D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1955.

Ramirez, A. Social influence and ethnicity of the communicator. Journal of Social Psychology, 1977, 102, 209-213.

Rogers, E. M. Communication Strategies for Family Planning. New York: Free Press, 1973.

Rogers, E. M. & Bhowmik, D. K. Homophily-Herophily: Relational concepts for communication research. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1971, 34, 523-538.

Ruechelle, R. C. An experimental study of audience recognition of emotional and intellectual appeals in persuasion. Speech Monographs, 1958, 25, 49-58.

Sikkink, D. E. An experimental study of the effects on the listener of anticlimax order and authority in an argumentative speech. Southern Speech Journal, 1956, 22, 73-78.

Sloman, C. L. Sex variables and source credibility: A Multivariate investigation. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1974.

Sprague, J. A. An investigation of the written critique behavior of college communication instructors. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1971.

Tan, A., Raudy, J., Huff, C. & Miles, J. Children's reactions to male and female newscasters: Effectiveness and believability. The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1980, 66, 201-205.

Vigliano, B. M. An investigation of the relationship between the sex of the speaker and the sex of the listener on message comprehension and judgment of speaker credibility. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, New York University, 1974.

Vondracek, S. I. & Vondracek, F. W. The manipulation and measurement of self-disclosure in preadolescents. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1971, 17, 51-58.

Wheeler, C., Wilson, J., & Tarantola, C. An investigation of children's social perception of child speakers with reference to verbal style. Central States Speech Journal, 1976, 27, 31-35.

Wheeless, L. R. The effects of attitude, credibility, and homophily on selective exposure to information. Speech Monographs, 1974, 41, 329-338.